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Epitaph For Jim Garrison: Romancing the Assassination

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by Edward Jay Epstein

When Jim Garrison, the former district attorney of Orleans, died of cancer on October 21, 1992, the obituaries called attention to two extraordinary events, that occurred a generation apart--one in fact, one in fiction-- that will be forever connected in the popular imagination. The real event, that took place in 1969, was his prosecution of Clay Shaw in New Orleans for conspiring to kill President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, which gave him the distinction of being the only prosecutor ever to try someone for the assassination. The fictional event, which took place in 1991 was Oliver Stone's stunning film, JFK in which Garrison, played by Kevin Costner, achieved his celluloid immortality as a soft-spoken truth-seeking district attorney who relentlessly investigates the Kennedy assassination and, despite all the obstacles thrown in his way by the federal establishment, heroically exposes the conspiracy responsible for killing the President. Even though this fictive rendition excited enormous interest among a worldwide audience of some 100 million people and even led to the film's distributor issuing new textbook supplements for a whole generation of students unborn at the time of the assassination, the real Garrison, and his treatment of the truth, deserves not to be forgotten.

In April 1967, I went to New Orleans to write about District Attorney Garrison for this magazine and inadvertently became part of his investigation. Once month earlier, he had shocked the world by arresting Clay L. Shaw, a socially-prominent civic leader and the founding director of the city's International Trade Mart, for conspiring to murder President Kennedy. He had explained to a bewildered press conference a week before that arrest: "My staff and I solved the assassination weeks ago. I wouldn't say this if we didn't have evidence beyond a shadow of a doubt."

Garrison's conspiracy thesis clearly contradicted the Warren Commission's conclusion that a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, acting without assistance, had been responsible for the assassination. But that did not necessarily mean he was wrong as far as I was concerned. In the course of writing my master's thesis at Cornell, which became the book *Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth*, I had examined the Warren Commission's staff records and found that its investigation, far from being the exhaustive examination it was taken for, had skimmed over unresolved issues. The Commission itself, appointed by President Lyndon Baines Johnson, was determined to have its report out before the 1964 election campaign began. So in June of 1963, just three months after its staff lawyers had begun their investigation at the assassination site in Dallas, it instructed them were supposed "to be closing doors, not opening them". One yawning gap in its investigation at that time was Oswald's activities in New Orleans. So I, for one, believed it was at least possible that a local district attorney, not hemmed in by the time pressures, political considerations and national security considerations that affected the Warren Commission, might have uncovered hidden associates of Oswald's in New Orleans.

Garrison had been born Earling Caruthers Garrison in Denniston, Iowa on November 20, 1921, but he legally changed his first name to plain "Jim" when he first entered Louisiana politics in the 1950s. He had already tried his hand as a pilot in the military in the second world war, a FBI agent

in Seattle and as a lawyer in New Orleans. After running but failing to win election as a judge, he ran as a reform candidate for district attorney in a three-man race and was elected in the run-off in 1962. He quickly made a reputation for himself, strapping on a pistol and himself leading well-publicized raids on brothels, after-hour bars and dice-games in the French Quarter.

"I am flamboyant," he would brag to the press. When the eight judges who oversaw his offices expenditures refused to authorize anymore expense funds for these forays, he suggested that they were under "racketeer influence," and for this unsupported charge, in February 1963, was tried and convicted of criminal defamation. Garrison appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court that the state law on defamation of officials was unconstitutional, and won-- thereby greatly expanding the latitude the public had in leveling charges against public officials.

I could see why Garrison was popularly referred to as the Jolly Green Giant when I met him for dinner at Broussards. He stood six foot six inches tall, with a self-conscious stoop that made him look even taller, as if he was larger than life. As he lumbered through the restaurant, he affably extended his political glad hand to acquaintances at almost every table.

His welcome to me was exceedingly gracious. He began by saying, almost solemnly, that my book on the Warren Commission had helped shape his decision to launch his investigation (which, as I learned later, was more or less the standard compliment he paid to almost all critics of the Warren Commission who soon began flocking to him like the children of Hamelin to the Pied Piper). He fixed me with his intense, almost walleye, stare, speaking slowly but with great articulateness. He traced his own intellectual development to two heroes: Ayn Rand, whose lone-wolf protagonist in *The Fountainhead* had exemplified to him the need for higher-conscious individuals acting like supermen; and Huey Long, the assassinated Governor of Louisiana, whose speeches attacking elite conspiracies, had attracted immense popular support.

As the leisurely dinner progressed, Garrison spelled out the conspiracy he had uncovered. Like the specialities, which the chef personally delivered dish by dish to the tables, his narrative was rich but sporadic. Its central character was David W. Ferrie, an ex-airline pilot and self-styled soldier of fortune, who was bizarre even by the relaxed standards of the French Quarter. He had orange pieces of fur glued to his head, having lost all his body hair from the disease alopecia, making him unforgettable in appearance. He professed to be a bishop in a quasi-political cult called the Orthodox Old Catholic Church of North America and worked on and off as a free-lance pilot, a pornography trafficker, a hypnotist and gas station operator. By the summer of 1963, when Oswald was living in New Orleans, he had also become involved in training anti-Castro guerrillas.

The day after the assassination, Garrison got a tip alleging that Ferrie had trained Oswald in marksmanship and detained Ferrie for questioning. A few hours later he was released, after the tipster, Jack Martin, who was known for providing false leads in other cases, completely recanted his story. Two years later, after Senator Russell Long told him that he had doubts about the Warren Commission's version of the assassination, Garrison resumed his pursuit of Ferrie. Even though Ferrie maintained that he had no connection whatsoever with Oswald, he found other witnesses that established, at least to his satisfaction, that Ferrie had become involved with Oswald through his anti-Castro activities. He was deeply suspicious of Ferrie's ice-skating trip to Houston, Texas the day after the assassination and hypothesized to me that he had been Oswald's get-away pilot. He then asserted with absolute authority that Ferrie was the "evil genius" who planned the mechanics of the assassination in Dallas.

The problem was this theory, at least for a criminal prosecution, was that Ferrie had died some six weeks ago. At the time, Garrison, who was getting ready to re-arrest him, he explained. His investigation, however, leaked to the press, and, on February 22, Ferrie's body was found in his apartment. (It turned out, a few hours before he died, Ferrie had complained to George Lardner of the *Washington Post* that Garrison was persecuting him.) The coroner of Orleans Parish, Dr. Nicholas Chetta, concluded from the autopsy that Ferrie had died of natural causes-- a cerebral hemorrhage caused by the rupture of a blood vessel. He ruled out suicide because a person ordinarily would not be aware a weak spot exists in a blood vessel and murder on the grounds that

if the rupture had been caused by an external blow there would necessarily be tissue damage and none was found. Although Garrison said he believed it was either suicide or murder, he did not challenge the coroner's finding. Instead, one week later, he arrested another man for the assassination: Clay Shaw.

When I asked what Shaw had to do with the assassination, he became more elliptical. "Its exactly like a chess problem," he said. "The Warren Commission move the same pieces back and forth and got nowhere. I made a new move and solved the problem." He explained that the surprise arrest was timed to prevent Shaw from destroying any of his personal papers, which his men gathered up from his home in the French Quarter immediately afterwards. He then offered to make this "important evidence" available to me.

Early the next morning, I went with my research associate, Jones Harris, to his office suite in the Criminal District Court Building, where Garrison had left word with his assistant, district attorney, James C. Alcock, that I "should start going through the evidence." He brought in six cardboard cartons that contained such Shaw's personal paraphernalia as letters, photographs, manuscripts, checkbooks, address books, calendars, blueprints for the renovation of houses in the French Quarters (which had been one of his civic projects) and a Mardi Gras costume and, before leaving us alone with it, he explained that the staff had yet to fully examine it. Even though a Judge's order had forbidden disclosure or discussion of the evidence in the case, Garrison apparently had no compunction about turning it over to a journalist to peruse.

Though none of this material, as far as I could see, had any bearing on the conspiracy Garrison had described to me the night before, Harris discovered a striking coincidence between a 5 digit number in Shaw's address book and one in Lee Harvey Oswald's book. Oswald's phone book contained the number 19106 preceded by the Cyrillic letters DD. Shaw's book contained the same number in an entry "Lee Odom, PO Box 19106, Dallas, Tex". It was of course only a partial match since the prefixes were different, but, if it proved to be more than a coincidence, it could provide a connection between the two men. Apprised of this discovery by Harris, Garrison immediately announced to the press that he had linked Shaw to Oswald. He stated without equivocation that Shaw and Oswald's address books had the identical entry in them "PO 19106" (which was untrue), that this number was "nonexistent" (which he had not yet determined) and that the number was a code, which when deciphered, produced the unlisted telephone number of Oswald's killer, Jack Ruby, and "no other number on earth" (which was also false). When asked by a reporter for the Times-Picayune how "PO 19106" became Ruby's number "WH 1-5601," Garrison, without missing a beat, explained that one simply transposed its third and last digit (so it became PO 16901) and then arbitrarily subtracted 1300. Since this nonsensical hocus-pocus still did not produce the "WH" portion of the number, Garrison added that the code was "subjective."

As it turned out upon investigation, the Post Office Box 19106 in Dallas not only existed but had been assigned to person listed in Shaw's book, Floyd Odom. He had contacted Shaw in 1957 in the hope of promoting a bloodless bullfight in New Orleans and left him his calling card, accounting for the entry. In any case, Odom's post office box number could not possibly have been the number in Oswald's address book, which had to be entered before he died in 1963, because, as the Dallas Post Office confirmed, that Post Office box number did not exist in Dallas before it was assigned to Odom in 1965. When caught in his own egregious false claim, Garrison attempted to divert attention, first by saying he wanted to find out "how many bull fights Mr. Odom actually produced"-- as if that was relevant-- and then by claiming he had found another number in Oswald's book which, when decoded, yielded the CIA's unlisted number in New Orleans (even though the CIA's number had been listed at the time in the phone directory). In each of these cases, he had, like a true Cabalist, drawn conspiratorial conclusions by attributing to innocent numbers, plucked out of a phone book, the sinister properties of hidden numbers that he claimed were encoded in them.

Garrison's unconventional methodology was not limited to concocting encoded phone numbers. It also accounted for the conspiracy charge at the center of his case against Clay Shaw. This allegation was that Clay Shaw, under the alias "Clay Bertrand," met with David Ferrie and Lee

Harvey Oswald in Ferrie's apartment on a single occasion in September 1963 and, in the presence of a fourth man, Perry Raymond Russo, plotted the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas. Ferrie and Oswald were now dead, and Shaw unequivocally denied that he had attended such a meeting (or, for that matter, knew Oswald or Ferrie), so Garrison's only possible witness to this putative event was Russo, a 25-year old insurance man from Baton Rouge who in 1963 had been in the pornography film business with Ferrie. But Garrison had not even known of Russo's story when he had announced on February 24, 1967 that he had "positively solved the assassination." Just as he inventively fashioned what appeared to be innocent phone numbers into a conspiratorial nexus, he developed Russo's bland story on a local television program that same night, in which he said he had been acquainted with Ferrie but he had no reason to believe he was involved in a plot to kill Kennedy, into one in which he said he witnessed the plot unfold. After seeing Russo on TV, Garrison wasted no time. The next day he dispatched Assistant D.A. Andrew "Moo Moo" Sciambra, a former pugilist, to Baton Rouge to interview him. Russo's story, according to the lengthy written report Sciambra submitted, mainly concerned Ferrie's sexual activities, including his efforts to develop an homosexual aphrodisiac and to acquire Cuban pornographic films (which Russo sold for him), but it contained nothing about a conspiracy that would validate Garrison's press claims. Russo did not recall any meeting in which Ferrie, Oswald, Shaw or anyone else discussed assassinating President Kennedy and, when shown a set of photographs of Shaw by Sciambra, Russo flatly stated that he had only seen Shaw on only two occasions from afar: one time at a political rally for Kennedy and the other time in a car at a gasoline station. Although such testimony, which precluded the possibility that Russo witnessed Shaw in a conspiratorial meeting in Ferrie's apartment, might seem exculpatory, Garrison realized that Russo might be induced by exotic techniques to fill in his story. On February 27, he had Russo drugged with sodium pentathol and re-interrogated. While in this semi-conscious state, Moo Moo Sciambra introduced the subject of "Clay Bertrand" by asking Russo "if he could remember any of the details about Clay Bertrand being up in Ferrie's apartment". Under such prompting, Russo gradually began to expand his story. Next, Garrison had him hypnotized by a Doctor Esmond Fatter, who told Russo to imagine a television screen in his mind. "You are in Ferrie's apartment... There will be Bertrand, Ferrie and Oswald... They are talking about assassinating someone". By the time Garrison had finished such "verifying tests," as he called them, Russo would be his sole witness to the assassination plot.

Such hypnotically-induced testimony eventually would be exposed in court, since, as Garrison realized, the defense had a right to examine all the accuser's statements, but he artfully managed to stretch out the interim between charge and the trial for over 22 months while he engaged in a wide range of diversionary actions. At one point, for example, he had a religious fund-raiser in California named Edgar Eugene Bradley arrested in Los Angeles on the charge of conspiring to kill the President, even though. As his bewildered staff confirmed, he had not a scintilla of evidence against this person other than an inflammatory anti-Kennedy letter that, it turned out, had been written by a different person with a similar name (He later claimed he was provoked into making this erroneous arrest by "disinformation" foisted on by the sponsors of the assassination). With similar cavalierness, he issued arrest warrants for three journalists, whom he had himself previously sought publicity from, accusing Walter Sheridan of NBC of "public bribery", David Chandler of Life Magazine of "perjury" and Richard Townley of WSDU-TV in New Orleans of "intimidation of a witness". He also used this pre-trial period, in which he had become the focus of national attention, to appear on such television programs as Johnny Carson show, where, when asked by Carson to reveal the new evidence he claimed he had, he reached magician-like into his black case and pulled out some old news photographs he had obtained from the Dallas Times Herald, taken soon after the assassination at the Texas Book Depository, that showed nothing more than a group of bystanders, at least two of whom worked in the building, being questioned by policemen. "Here are the pictures of five of them being arrested and they've never been shown before," he said, holding up the blurry prints. "Several of these men arrested have been connected by our office to the Central Intelligence Agency," even though he was referring to bystanders whose identity he had not yet determined-- no less their organizational affiliations, and then extrapolated "An element of the Central Intelligence Agency of our country killed John Kennedy". By this time, he had considerably proliferated the "forces behind the conspiracy." When he began his investigation in December 1966, he told Senator Long that only a few insignificant men were

involved-- referring to Ferrie and a few of his bizarre associates. After Ferrie's death, the conspiracy began to expand. He told me in early 1967, after he had arrested Shaw, the group included perverts--both Ferrie and Shaw were homosexual-- and anti-Castro Cubans. Then, as he went from interview to interview, the conspiracy escalated to include Minutemen, oil millionaires, Dallas policemen, munitions exporters, reactionaries, White Russians, elements of "the invisible Nazi substructure" and CIA agents.

When the trial finally began on January 21, 1969, Shaw's defense lawyer Irvin Dymond made short work of the credibility of Garrison's only witness to the conspiracy at issue. Moo Moo Sciambra's memorandum describing Russo's pre-hypnosis story showed that Russo originally had excluded Shaw from any meeting in Ferrie's apartment he witnessed. Moreover, during his cross-examination, Russo himself admitted that he had told Lieutenant Edward O'Donnell, a veteran officer of the New Orleans police department, that Shaw probably had not been the man he had seen in Ferrie's apartment-- after Shaw had been arrested. Moreover, the shadowy figure of Clay Bertrand, whom Russo claimed was the alias Shaw used when he met him, was now acknowledged by Dean Andrews, the jive-talking lawyer who had first introduced the name "Clay Bertrand" into the investigation back in 1964, to be nothing more than a name he made up "out of thin air" to shield the identity of a friend of his. So how could Russo assert that this was the name Clay Shaw was using in 1963-- unless the name had been fed to him by the prosecution?

Despite the apparent collapse of his case, Garrison had his assistants darken the courtroom and screen, ten times no less, the celebrated amateur film of the assassination made by Abraham Zapruder in Dallas, so the jurors saw, over and over again, the gruesome scene of Kennedy's head being shattered by a bullet. They also called a parade of ear witnesses, all of whom heard shots--or their echoes -- emanating from different directions. He also presented as his surprise witness an impeccably-dressed New Yorker named Charles I. Spiesel. Spiesel testified matter-of-factly that on a trip to New Orleans he had also found himself at a party where the assassination was being plotted by most of the same characters at the Russo party. Under cross-examination, however, Spiesel admitted that he himself had been the victim of a vast conspiracy for some sixteen years in which the conspirators, who included police, his own psychiatrist and some 50 hypnotists, followed him around New York, tapped his phones, caused him to make errors in his business, prevented him from having normal sexual relations, kept him under their hypnotic control and were so proficient at assuming the identity of his relatives that he had fingerprinted his own daughter repeatedly to assure she was not an alien impostor. While such excursions may have held interest to the assassination buffs attending the event, it had no direct bearing on the case being tried.

Garrison himself rarely appeared at the trial -- not even for the testimony or cross-examination of the man he had accused of conspiring to kill the President. When he finally made his closing statement, he mentioned the defendant's name only once in a disjointed 25 minute speech. Instead, borrowing from Kennedy's celebrated rhetoric, he told the jury "ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country". Even though it was past midnight, it took the jury less than an hour to unanimously reach its verdict: Shaw was not guilty. Two years to the day had elapsed since Shaw's arrest and he was nearly bankrupt from the cost of his legal defense. Although Shaw left court on March 1, 1969 an acquitted man, he was not yet free of Garrison who, despite the hoary principle of double jeopardy, re-arrested Shaw and attempted to re-try him for perjury. Eventually, a Federal court intervened and quashed the re-indictment. (Shaw, wearied by more than four years of prosecution, died in 1973).

So ended the evidence part of Garrison's process, which the New York Times called, "one of the most disgraceful chapters in the history of American jurisprudence." Even assassination buffs were dismayed by the dearth of evidence it produced. The local press, which Garrison had tried so hard to win over, now condemned him; with the States-Item calling for his resignation, on the grounds that "his persecution of Clay L. Shaw was a pervasion of the legal process such as has not often been seen".

Such condemnations missed both the point and power of Garrison's appeal. His process, which did

not end for another 20 years (when it was encapsulated in a movie), was not about forensic evidence-- Shaw served merely as a convenient means to an end-- it was about something far more tormenting to his public, the conspicuous absence of evidence. He was concerned not with what existed, and could be verified and tested through accepted procedures, but what was agonizingly missing from the investigation, which he reeled off like a litany: the X-ray and photographs of President Kennedy's body (that had not been available even to the Warren Commission), four frames of the Zapruder films (that had not been published in the Warren Report), Classified documents in the national archives (which were unavailable to the public for 75 years, the President's brain (that had vanished from government custody), bullets that had not been found at the scene of the assassination, missing (or dead) witnesses. The very fact such evidence were missing from the public record revealed for him of the systematic suppression of the truth about the assassination and the power of forces behind this cover up. Why should something be kept from the public, he asked, if it has no sinister implications-- playing on the concern, and repugnance over government secrecy in a democracy. Once he had focussed attention of his audience on missing evidence, it took him only a single rhetorically step to draw the most sinister connection between it and the succession to power. For example, he asked on the cover of Ramparts magazine in 1968: "Who controls the CIA? Who controls the FBI? Who controls the archives where this evidence is locked up for so long that it is unlikely that there is anybody in this room who will be alive when it is released? This is really your property and the property of the people of this country. Who has the arrogance and brass to prevent the people from seeing that evidence? Who indeed? The one man who has profited the most from the assassination-- your friendly President, Lyndon Johnson."

Garrison, to be sure, was not the first crusader to attack the dragon of missing evidence. Exploiting the public's fear and fascination with secrecy had, as Edward Shils argued in his book *Torment of Secrecy*, deep roots in a society suspicious of aristocratic privilege. In the 1950s, Senator Joe McCarthy, who also portrayed himself in the center of an apocalyptic struggle to wrest secrets from hidden elites, deduced much of his evidence that a Communist conspiracy was infiltrating the American government and media from missing documents. For example, in one of his more celebrated appearances before the Tydings Senate Sub-Committee, he charged that the FBI had sealed away classified documents that revealed there were eighty-one card-carrying Communists employed by the State Department. When President Harry S. Truman then waived his executive privilege and made these files available to the Tydings Committee, McCarthy, finding they did support his allegation, claimed that they had been "raped and rifled" before they had been shown to the Committee, and he now demanded the release of the "real files". The advantage he found in basing his charges on missing evidence was that they could not be refuted because the very absence of substantiation was further proof of the conspiracy's power to expunge information.

Garrison, however, proved far more imaginative than earlier self-styled populist in using this mode of inquiry to project on television and magazine interviews a vision of a grand conspiracy. Consider, for example, how he magically extrapolated from what might have been a stray pebble, President Johnson's participation in the conspiracy. On a television show in Texas, he held up two newspaper photographs taken about ten minutes after the assassination. In the first one, an unidentified man in a dark suit is looking towards the curb on the street near where President Kennedy was shot. Although it is not apparent to the naked eye, Garrison announced he could discern in this photograph, partially concealed in the matted grass by the curb, a pebble-like object (which his staff later concluded from the blow up might indeed be a pebble). He then identified this object as a .45 caliber bullet, the one "which killed John Kennedy, which had markings on it that would show [that] the automatic gun that it came [was a] handgun." He then deduced from this "bullet" that the assassin must have been in a sewer in front of the President, not in the Book Depository behind the President as the Warren Commission concluded. Even more amazing, from the second photograph he presented, which showed only the man walking away from the curb, Garrison deduced in Sherlock-Holmes style, first, that the man from his appearance-- a dark suit -- had to be a "federal agent", second, from the man's closed fist, that he "got the bullet clutched in his hand, the bullet that killed John Kennedy." He never explained how he could know that a bullet was in a closed hand, or its caliber, but since this .45 caliber bullet (or pebble) had been conspicuously

missing from the inventory of the Warren Commission's evidence, he announced that "the bullet which killed John Kennedy, which fell in the grass with pieces of the President's head , was in the hands of the federal government ten minutes after the President was dead." And, Eureka: "This meant that the Federal Government knowingly participated in framing Lee Oswald" and that "Lyndon Johnson had to know this."

The putative gunman in the sewer was not the only member of the conspiracy that Garrison had derived from missing evidence in his long media campaign. In a 26-page long Playboy interview, he had posited a team of 14 additional assassins, firing from four different locations-- two of whom were probably assigned to pick up all the cartridge cases (explaining why they were never found). Since four frames of the famous Zapruder film had not been published in the Warren Commission, he further deduced that these missing frames revealed the tell-tale marks of stray bullets on a road sign (that was also missing). When Life, which owned the Zapruder film, published the missing frames and they showed no traces of a bullet-stressed sign, he suggested that had been air-brushed out. Since a spectator at the scene, who fainted 20 minutes before the motorcade arrived, had not been identified in the Warren Report, he claimed he was part of a paramilitary diversionary action that simulated an epileptic fit (Subsequently, this alleged paramilitary diversionist turned out to be Jerry Boyd Belknap, an employee of the nearby Dallas Morning News who had been taking medication for a head injury he suffered in a car accident). Because the X-ray and autopsy photographs of the President's body, which were the best evidence of the path of the bullets, were locked away in the National Archives, and not even the Warren Commission had examined them, he reasoned that they showed the President was shot from the front in a cross-fire, not from the back as the Warren Commission concluded. "Front was changed into back when the Zapruder film and autopsy X-rays were kept out of sight," he added in his book. Since all tangible evidence of this imputed "cross fire" -- the automatic rifles and .45 caliber pistol used by the assassins, the cartridge cases ejected at the four sniper nests, the stray bullets, the communications equipment to coordinate the gunfire, the entry wounds in the President's neck -- had vanished, he concluded that the conspiracy possessed the "hidden machinery" necessary 'to remove all stain and make it appear to have been something less. " This capacity brought him back to the CIA which he asserted had "incinerated" evidence, saying the Warren Commission's failed to obtain "a secret CIA memo on Oswald's activities in Russia" because it had been "destroyed" the day after the assassination. (In fact, the "secret CIA memo" he referred to appears in Volume XVIII of the Warren Commission's twenty-six volumes of published testimony and evidence-- since only a State Department copy of the memo had been destroyed in a photocopier). He asserted that CIA documents consigned to the National Archives proved Oswald was a CIA employee (even though this material was available to the Warren Commission) and cited, as his "clincher" the ultimate missing evidence: the "consistent refusal of the Federal government" to provide "any information" about the CIA's role in the assassination.

Garrison explained why many others failed to see this enormous conspiracy in his book *Heritage Of Stone* that he wrote less than a year after the Clay Shaw trial (and in which he does not mention even Shaw). Here he sees Americans, inhabiting the same country but living in two different realms of consciousness. The first one is naive and innocent, where everyone is duped by "the glitter of the official lie." In this world, he explains: "An individual cannot cope with the unseen forces of the superstate" because " His perception is limited by his assumption that things are as they appear to be and by his belief that he is living in a world in which evil is easily recognized". So, believing what they see, hear and read corresponds to reality, these Americans failed to see that " an intricate contrivance of men for the clandestine production of illusion had become ... a manipulator of America." Or that they were invisible, noting: "The main reason for the inability of the American people and the press to recognize the conspiracy to kill President Kennedy was the fact that its operations all occurred in another dimension, a dimension which is generally not known to exist in our nation".

This second dimension is evil as well as manipulative. In it an "invisible government tat begins and ends with deception" appropriates power to itself through assassinations and conceals from the populace "government force that is as criminal as the Germany of Hitler or the Russia of Stalin."

This elite, supported by the "military-industrial complex" was the hidden sponsor of the Viet Nam War and nuclear arms race. To assure its invisibility, this "power elite" employs technicians capable of inflicting on its enemies "heart attacks, falls, shootings by 'deranged men' and dozens of other kinds of misadventures" (which presumably explains the sort of problems visited on his surprise witness at the trial, Charles Spiesel). It engages in "thought control" over the media and, in the case of those who escape this "concentration camp of the mind," it stage-manages in the media "massive discreditation." This accounts for why "Anyone seeking to inquire into the meaning of the assassination found himself in an enchanted maze which steadily led him away from reality."

Garrison, having broken out of this enchanted maze and penetrated deep into the other dimension, portrays himself as battling to wrest from the invisible elite the dark secrets that perpetuate its power. His weapon in this titanic struggle is the missing evidence that he, but not others in the naive realm, can see and interpret.

With such an rarefied view of reality, Garrison did not need to modify his stance when mid way through his 20 year quest much of the evidence he claimed had been suppressed emerged. In 1976, occasioned by concern over the Watergate revelations of government cover-ups, the House of Representatives' Select Committee on Assassination, conducted it own investigation. Unlike the Warren Commission's more limited effort, the Select Committee spent three-year on its investigation, which delved into some of the deepest recesses of the CIA, FBI and other government agencies. It also addressed the issues raised by Garrison and other critics of the Warren Report (including myself) by appointing various panels of independent experts to analyze crucial evidence that had been missing from the Warren Commission's investigation. Most notably, it cleared up the mystery surrounding the autopsy results by empanelling nine leading forensic pathologists, including Dr. Cyril H. Wecht, a well-respected critic of the Warren Report, to examine the complete set of the X-rays and color photographs taken of the President's body at the time of the autopsy as well as the original Zapruder film of the actual assassination. These experts, most of whom worked for local authorities, had between them experience in performing over 100,000 autopsies.

The panel first established the authenticity of these autopsy photographs by having forensic dentists compare them with Kennedy's pre-mortem dental records and other medical X-rays. Satisfied they had not been tampered with, it then proceeded to resolve discrepancies proceeding from the original autopsy by re-questioning most of the medical personnel involved both in the emergency attempt to prolong the President's life at Parkland Hospital in Dallas and the autopsy performed at the Naval Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland. They also re-examined the medical of Governor John B. Connally of Texas, who had been seated in front of him, and also wounded in the fusillade.

The panel then examined the autopsy X-Rays and photographs, which provide the best evidence of the path of a bullet because as the missile advances through the body it does progressively more damage. It was thus able to determine that one shot hit the President in the back of his shoulder--two inches lower than where the Warren Commission's diagram placed it-- and that a second bullet had entered the rear of the President's head near the cowlick area and exited from the right front. These doctors took into account a frame-by-frame analysis of the Zapruder film that showed the President's head moved backwards at the time of impact, not forward as might be expected, but, because of possible neurological reactions to such a wound, they decided that there was not a relationship between the direction that the head moves and the direction from which the bullet struck the head. So, although they disagreed as to the precise sequence of the shots that hit President Kennedy and Governor Connally, they unanimously concluded, as did the Warren Commission, that all the discernible wounds suffered by President Kennedy had been caused by shots fired from above and behind him.

Moreover, another panel of firearms experts, ballistically matched the identifiable fragments of the bullets found in the car to the rifle found at the Texas Book Depository. And a third panel, using an exotic state-of-the-art technique called neutron particle analysis, in which even the most minute

traces of metals found in a bullet can be analyzed to an accuracy of one-billionth of a gram by bombarding them with neutrons in a nuclear reactor, concluded that the composition of all traces from the bullet and fragments found at the murder scene exactly matched that of the unfired bullet found in the chamber of the rifle in the Texas Book Depository, purchased earlier that year by Lee Harvey Oswald.

It is possible that someone else may have fired Oswald's rifle that day or fired another rifle and missed entirely (as the House Select Committee itself suggested in its final Report), but no mystery remained about the source of the fatal gun fire. According to this no-longer missing evidence, President and Governor Connally were both hit from above and behind with bullets fired the rifle and lot of ammunition found in the Texas Book Depository.

For over a decade, in court and media opportunities, Garrison had proclaimed that this same autopsy evidence, if only it could be examined, would prove definitively that Kennedy was riddled with bullets in a crossfire from different rifles and an automatic pistol located in front, below and below him. When it proved him wrong, Garrison diverted to other evidence that was still missing. For in his mode of inquiry, whatever had been revealed by the government was ipso facto suspect. What remained missing, on the other hand, provided him with a blank slate for sketching out the conspiracy he had envisioned without fear of refutation. So he deftly switched his focus to the subject of the missing President's brain, which had been returned by the National Archives in 1965 to his brother Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, and presumably then buried in the President's grave. He wrote in his new book, appropriately called, *On The Trail Of The Assassins*, "the brain, which is still missing ... might show from what the directions the head shots came" (By pluralizing "direction" and "shot" he slipped back in those conspirators who had been rendered non-existent by the examination of the X-rays and autopsy pictures). The ghoulish idea the President's brain was missing from the National Archives-- as if that is the proper repository for Presidential remains-- could again to intensify the torment over government secrecy.

In addition, he also continued to hammer away at the fact that Warren Commission documents were still secreted in the National Archives. He recited their cryptic titles and anguished over "the order to conceal assassination evidence for 75 years by the federal government." Actually, there was no such order. Many investigative files are withheld by law for 75 year-- a number chosen arbitrarily to exceed the lifespan of persons likely to be mentioned in government reports, and thereby protect their privacy-- but in the case of the Warren Commission material, President Johnson in 1966 waived this requisite and ordered all documents opened to the public except those containing the names of confidential informers, information damaging to innocent parties and information about agencies operating procedures. By 1988, some 60,000 pages had been released. And the documents that still remain classified under these guidelines were not sinister secrets kept from the Warren Commission but material that had been voluntarily turned over to it by the CIA, FBI, State Department and other agencies.

None of his legerdemain, or his rantings about the demonology of the second dimension, had a deleterious effect on his political career. After his debacle in the Shaw trial, where he denounced by the local press as "a man without principle who would pervert the legal process to his own ends," and after it had been disclosed that he had been discharged from the Army for psychiatric reasons, he still easily won re-election as District Attorney in 1969 with 53 per cent of the vote. Denied a second shot at Clay Shaw, he abandoned the prosecutorial route, and quietly dropped the dozen or so collateral indictments against critical journalist, defecting employees and recalcitrant witnesses-- including the perjury case against the jivester, Dean Andrews. So, in the end, no one ever went to prison because of his conspiracy case. He concentrated instead on television talk-shows and media interviews.

By the end of his third term as district attorney in 1973, he found himself in the dock as a defendant, being tried on federal charges of accepting bribes and conspiring to protect illegal pinball gambling. Although he won an acquittal for himself, acting as his own attorney, he lost his subsequent bid for re-election that year-- no doubt because he had been himself indicted as a

conspirator. Returning to private life, he wrote a fast-paced assassination thriller, the *Star Spangled Contract*, which demonstrated, as might be expected his talent for fictionizing. Retaining his flamboyant flair for politics, he successfully campaigned in 1978 for a seat on Louisiana's Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. While on the court, he tried his hand at film acting, playing a New Orleans judge in "The Big Easy." By 1988, for most of the world outside Orleans Parish, Garrison had become a forgotten man. His prosecution of Clay Shaw was seen even by his former staff members as a tragic mistake that ruined the life of an innocent man. His repeated media fabrications --such as transmuting a pebble in a photograph to a missing bullet President Johnson was hiding-- had destroyed his credibility even among talk-show hosts. Even assassination buffs found that his demagogic obsession with missing rather than existent evidence had made him a menace to any serious inquiry into the facts surrounding the assassination.

His apocalyptic vision of the secret elite operating from the second dimension might have faded into obscurity if was not for Oliver Stone, who, after reading his "On The Trail Of The Assassin," resonated with its potential. He explained in the best Hollywood pitch style to Robert Sam Anson in *Esquire*: "It reads like a Dashiell Hammett whodunit. It starts out as a bit of a seedy crime with small traces, and then the gumshoe district attorney follows the trail, and the trail widens and widens, and before you know it, it's no longer a small-town affair. That seemed to me the kernel of a very powerful movie." So he paid Garrison \$250,000 for the rights to the book-- and hired him as a guide to the other dimension, which would be revealed in the movie, *JFK*. He also cast Garrison the actor as Chief Justice Earl Warren, so he could have the last laugh on the Warren Commission.

So one full generation after the trial of Clay Shaw, Garrison arose from the ashes, phoenix-like, in Hollywood. He was now reunited with his former star witness Perry Raymond Russo, who he had twenty-one years earlier hypnotized into recalling the assassination conspiracy. This time around, they were both serving as advisors (and bit actors)to Stone's movie, which also had spliced into it for an air of pseudo-documentary reality, the Zapruder film of the bloody event. In his final incarnation, Garrison achieved in fiction what he failed to do in fact: he obtained the missing evidence and revealed the existence of the secret elite that had assassinated Kennedy, pulled a coup' d'etat, and prolonged American's involvement in the war in Vietnam. Through the medium of this film, Garrison may yet incorporate in the popular imagination, at least among those in the audience confused by Stone's blurring of fact and fiction, all the claims, and outright delusions, that he had delivered from non-existent evidence, hypnosis and encounters with the forces from the second dimension

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